

SPARKS

MARCH 1998

Weather Spotting

Spring is fast approaching, and with it brings the pleasantries of rebirth including crocuses, forsythia, daffodils, and the nesting of numerous creatures. At this time of year, I also look forward to longer days, school recess, and even, with much trepidation, severe weather.

As a student of the earth with formative years beginning in the sixties, any phenomenon that whispers the power of nature evokes a two syllable "cool" from me. As an adult, I have learned to funnel my awe with the practiced responsi-

bility of a scientist. It is in the scientist's hat that I convey my opinion and news to you this month.

Over the last few years many residents of Evansville and vicinity have been disappointed by the closing of the Evansville National Weather Service Office. This action, part of the modernization plan for the NWS (National Weather Service), ended a formidable 100 year long manned observer, weather office tradition. Be reassured, however, we will still get continuous weather records from Evansville, thanks to the technology of ASOS (Automated Surface Observing System) operated by the NWS at the Evansville Regional Airport.

When it comes right down to it, the most crucial service the NWS provides is that of alerting, hence protecting the public from the wrath of severe weather. The loss of the office in Evansville, by my analysis, has put the Tri-State at more risk for severe weather, because the signs of nasty low-level weather systems are not likely to be identified in time to alert the public to eminent danger.

I haven't given up hope that the government will change its position, and fund a Doppler radar for Evansville. I'm convinced that it is our government's responsibility by law. Much of the coverage by the media on this issue portrays a rather grim future, but there is still a chance that a NWS Office (NWSO) will be reopened in the Tri-State area. On March 17th, the Modernization Transition Committee (MTC) will get together once again to make a decision on the fate of the Evansville NWSO. All indications are that the final decommissioning will again be postponed, providing one more stay of execution.

So, there is no reason to yet mourn the death of the Evansville NWS Office. In fact, recently an NWS presence has been reestablished in Evansville. The Paducah NWSO has appointed a veteran staff member, Mr. Ron Fields, to serve as Special Liaison Officer to the Tri-State. Ron is here to provide information and training to the public, and to improve the products and services the Paducah office can give us using the existing technology of the NWS. Ron's office is in the communications room of the Evansville-Vanderburgh County Emergency Management Agency; Ron's phone number is (812) 424-7861. He has indicated that his door is always open, and I know he'd especially like to talk to hams, because presently he is taking the TARS-sponsored no code technician class.

Ron, myself, Norm W9AU, Mark Parker N9NYF, and the EMA's Sherman Greer and Adam Groupe, recently met to discuss the development of operation plans for the Tri-State Weather Emergency Net based on 147.150 MHz. For the first time since I've lived in Evansville (four years), I expect to see a formal weather net using codified procedures put in place. Plans for this net will be completed sometime near the end of March. The general strategy will be one that has room to grow. We'll start with a handful of control operators and spotters, and expand as the roles and capabilities of participants become better defined.

If you have any ideas or comments about the Tri-State Weather Emergency Net, please contact me in writing or by phone. I'd also like to hear from anyone who is ready to commit considerable time to the weather net (that includes packet) initiative. More casual "wanna be" observers can sign up when we are organized and make an official call for volunteers and new recruits.

I am optimistic about our plans for the weather net, but hope we won't have to use it too much and that the NWS network will spot all threats of severe weather. No matter how you look at it.....it all boils down to communication.

Joanne KB9LXZ

EVC Weather Net

It's a go! On March 31st, Norm, W9AU and I met with representatives of the Paducah National Weather Service Office, the Evansville-Vanderburgh County (EVC) Emergency Management Agency and Stephen Poirier, KC6GNV, the Skywarn coordinator who operates from the Paducah NWSO. We have an operation procedure in place for the activation of a weather net on the 147.15 repeater, and plan to activate the net when it is needed. As I mentioned last month, the plan is designed to evolve. For the time being, Norm and I will serve as net control (if we're available), but we'll be looking for additional control operators and spotters soon. Due to the late date, detailed information about net procedures and the criteria for calling it could not be included in this issue of **Sparks**. Look for details in the May issue.

Joanne KB9LXZ

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**Evansville-Vanderburgh
County (EVC) SKYWARN
Weather Net**

As mentioned last month, a formal Amateur Radio SKYWARN net has been established for our area. The net has been activated three times by the authority of the Paducah NWSO and the EVC Emergency Management Agency. The net was called on the evenings of April 8th and 15th (no, I don't think the IRS had anything to do with it!), and the afternoon of April 23. The severe weather came upon us before our procedures had been published, so only a few people were called to serve as net control operators. SKYWARN net control operators to date include myself, Mark Parker N9WYF, Norm King W9AU, and Lisa Patterson N9QVD. **WE DEFINITELY NEED MORE VOLUNTEER NET CONTROL OPERATORS!**

We were fortunate that the severe weather only dealt a glancing blow to our immediate area, and no lives were lost in the neighboring areas that experienced a direct hit. Because severe weather can strike anywhere, it is important for everyone to have a preparedness plan.

The Evansville SKYWARN net was designed to assist in warning the public in cases of severe weather. Net operating procedures are outlined below. TARS members will have an opportunity to discuss this plan at our May meeting. Paducah National Weather Service Office Special Liaison Officer Ron Fields will present the program, and will offer a Weather Spotter class in June. I'll be at these meetings also, to answer your questions about the net, and to search out new volunteers.

Tri-State Emergency Net: Severe Weather Events

Purpose:

Coordinate amateur radio weather spotters in Vanderburgh, Posey, Warrick, and Henderson Counties.

Facilitate reports to authorities (EMA and NWSO-PAH), especially during events that escape detection by NWS technology.

Design formal guidelines to establish alert procedures and cooperation between NWSO-PAH, EVC-EMA and Tri-State hams during severe weather emergencies.

Establish direct communications with control operators stationed at NWSO-PAH, relying on repeaters in Herod, IL (146.88) and Marion, KY (147.285), or on other amateur frequencies.

Strategy:

The weather net will usually be operated as an integral component of EVC-EMA communications coordination center, which will be activated during severe weather.

Start small, with a few designated control operators.

Expand to include counties beyond TARS immediate influence including: Gibson; Pike; Spencer; Daviess; McLean; Webster; Union; Crittenden; Livingston;

Pope; Hardin; Saline; Gallatin; White; Edwards; and Wabash.

Control operators will run nets from home or other designated locations including EVC-EMA (mobile is possibility). Control operators can run the net from any location, because during severe weather, time is of the essence. Mobilizing an individual during an actual emergency can waste time—weather changes rapidly, and mobilization can also put operators at physical risk, taking them away from personal comforts.

Design the program around participants' desires and strengths.

Use experience to make improvements.

Safety standards:

Never put anyone's life at risk. Radio operators are at greatest risk from lightning.

Participants are not required to go mobile. The decision to go mobile from secure, safe places to chase tornadoes or other severe weather is entirely the responsibility of the individual.

Net activation:

The net can be activated three ways:

- 1) **Severe weather identified by the NWS.**
Procedures to activate Tri-State weather emergency net implemented.
Alert PAH Skywarn amateurs that a net has been activated in the Tri-State.
- 2) **Severe weather spotted by emergency services, net activated by EMA.**
Alert the designated weather net control operators to activate.
Activate EOC, or open up EMA communications office (provide a public safety telecommunicator).
Announcement on 147.15 ASAP
- 3) **Severe weather spotted by trained spotter, control operator decides to activate net**
Get information to NWS ASAP
Contact EVC-EMA

Responsibilities of NWS:

Determine when weather conditions are severe enough to activate the Tri-State weather emergency net.

Call net when appropriate.

Establish and maintain procedures for Tri-State weather emergency net activation. This should include a message in the Thunderstorm Outlook and on NOAA weather radio, a phone call to EVC-EMA (severe weather phone mail box), and an alternate way to contact designated control operators especially during non-working hours (e.g., via telephone or pager).

Inform NWS-PAH personnel on procedures for Tri-State severe weather net activation

Responsibilities of EVC-EMA:

Establish communications point to accept and disseminate reports and information during severe weather. The EVC-EMA will communicate with the NWS, City-County public safety sources, amateur radio operators, REACT members, and members of the public.

Ensure that City-County warning procedures are maintained.

Maintain space and equipment (including operating instructions) for amateur radio net control at EOC.

Set up and maintain control operator activation notification procedure (through phone mail box, pagers, telephone, 147.150 MHz 155.820 MHz, or 800 MHz radio system).

Monitor 147.15 repeater.

Remain alert to weather watches and warnings, as well as the daily Thunderstorm Outlooks.

Requirements and responsibilities of net participants:

Amateur Radio Operator License.

Weather spotter training.

Repeat weather spotter training once every two years.

Maintain lists of current phone numbers of designated control operators, trained amateur spotters, and ham frequencies used for reporting purposes.

Amateur operators designated to establish net control at the EVC-EMA must have EVC-EMA volunteer staff status.

Establish an "on call" schedule for net control operators.

Determine the Skywarn frequencies (repeaters) that can be used from locations where control operators are most likely to be (for example home or work).

Design and maintain log sheets used during net activation (winter weather, severe weather, flooding, net status and check-ins)

Remain alert to weather watches and warnings, as well as the daily Thunderstorm Outlooks.

Tri-State Skywarn net control operator protocol and instructions:

"This is call sign activating the Evansville Skywarn net on date and time, and I am located give control operator location. This net has been called according to the authority of identify individual(s) who called the net.

"Severe weather has been spotted in the Tri-State region. Give current information regarding weather status.

"Please stand by for additional information and instructions.

Options:

- Contact NWS-PAH and EVC-EMA.

Get control operator to EVC-EMA ASAP (if net is not at the EVC-EMA, state whether you or another operator is on rout to EVC-EMA).

Request and/or accept spotter reports (keep log of all weather reports and net information).

Review signs of severe weather requested from spotters.

Call for check-ins with locations.

Request operator to relay report over land lines.

Request operator to relay report over radio frequencies.

Make contact with PAH hams

State Skywarn net at on date at time, returning the repeater back to normal operations.

73. This is identify control operator."

Activity summary: The net called on April 8 resulted in several reports of severe weather that were called in to Paducah NWSO by net control operator Joanne KB9LXZ. At least two funnel clouds were sighted in the Evansville area, although not by SKYWARN net participants. On April 15, the net was called following a tornado touchdown near Flora, Illinois; the storm then tracked into the Tri-State area. Mark N9NYF began as net control operator, with Norm W9AU taking over after about three hours. Luckily, the severe weather jumped over the Evansville area, but another tornado touched down near Otwell, on the Pike County-Dubois County line. It could have touched down in or near Evansville, but we were lucky. We were alerted to call a SKYWARN net on April 23. Lisa N9QVD at EMA headquarters began the net. By the time Joanne KB9LXZ had arrived, the alert had been cancelled.

We think the SKYWARN net has fulfilled its purpose so far. We will depend on participants to check in and supply the much needed ground checks about severe weather when the next SKYWARN net is called. Please try to participate—this is what ham radio is all about. And remember, Ron Fields will conduct a Weather Spotter training session on June 11, from 6:30 to 8:30pm, at the Red Cross Bldg. See you there!

Joanne KB9LXZ

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"The threat of severe weather in the Tri-State is now passed. Give current information regarding weather status. Thank you all for your assistance and cooperation during this net. This is identify control operator closing the Tri-

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Minutes: Board Meeting for April, 1998

Randy N9YAI called the meeting to order at 7:00pm. Donuts for the SIGECO field trip meeting were discussed. Hal WB9FNN reminded us that it's time to get the generators tuned up for Field Day. He will arrange to send them to Rich N9OPS. N9WYG must withdraw from the Board of Directors, as he is no longer able to attend the meetings. The Board elected Hal WB9FNN to fill the remainder of his term. Bill K4LRX led a discussion of classes for the No-Code Tech license. Attendance has been low in the classes, and some people who start out tend to "disappear" without finishing. Perhaps a fee should be charged for courses. It could include the cost of the textbook, plus a complimentary membership in TARS. The amount of the charge will be established later. Joanne KB9LXZ discussed the weather net; it is official now! She will report on our insurance coverage later. The tailgate party will be at Wesselman Woods, where a shelter house can be reserved for \$47.50. June 13 was suggested for the date; the membership will be polled about this at the April meeting. Kenya KB9RBO and

Nancy KB9PAD will prepare coffee at meetings until further notice. A membership list with autopatch codes will be published in the May issue of Sparks. The Repeater Committee is still looking for a location for the packet node. The meeting adjourned at 8:42. These minutes submitted by Norm King W9AU.

Minutes: Club Meeting For April, 1998

The April meeting was held at the SIGECO building on Main Street. Tom Turpen and Benny Naas explained the energy distribution systems for both gas and electricity. John Small W9FHA then explained more about the communications that makes it all possible. Joanne KB9LXZ was recognized for her work with the SKYWARN net. The members approved holding a tailgate party at Wesselman Woods on June 13, and reserving a shelter house. Joe KB9GMC discussed Field Day, assuring everyone that he was not coordinating the event again this year. Yeah--right! Charlie N9GWS thanked the Red Cross Soccer Tournament workers. These minutes submitted by Norm King W9AU.

Are SKYWARN nets considered to be emergency communications?

SKYWARN nets are called when severe weather warnings are issued for our area by the National Weather Service (NWS), and, since these are not declared emergencies, they are not *bona fide* emergency communications. They nevertheless constitute an important aspect of public service that hams can perform. When a SKYWARN net is in progress, the net control operator is in direct communication with the NWS office in Paducah, Kentucky, continually relaying reports of severe weather from the field to the Paducah office, and continually updating the current weather conditions for observers here. Again, SKYWARN activities are dependent on the availability of repeaters throughout the area served by the net. Ultimately, we hope that the SKYWARN net will serve a large portion of the Tri-state area, not just Vanderburgh and adjacent counties.

What is the connection between SKYWARN and EMA?

SKYWARN is a rather informal program sponsored by the NWS. Each local area establishes its own procedures

and style of working with the nearest NWS office, according to local needs and capabilities. Many SKYWARN nets are controlled from a National Weather Service office. Since there is no such office at the present time in Evansville, we are operating from the office of Ron Fields, the NWS Special Liaison Officer for Evansville, which just happens to be in the communications room at the Evansville-Vanderburgh County EMA office. There is no formal connection between SKYWARN and EMA. Of course, the EMA encourages SKYWARN activity, and it monitors SKYWARN proceedings, but it neither controls nor actively participates in the nets.

- Why shouldn't I go out to find severe weather when a warning is issued?

In the first place, we don't want to lose any TARS members or anyone else. Second, if we sent you out chasing severe weather, and you were injured by strong winds, blowing or falling debris, or downed power lines, we could be sued (including the entire TARS organization and "we" as individuals). Not only that, but the fewer people on the roads during an episode of severe weather the better. If someone else is injured because you were hurrying to find a tornado, you could be held liable, especially since public officials had already warned us that conditions were dangerous. So what were you doing out on the roads at such a time? The SKYWARN Spotter guide issued by the Paducah office of NWS begins with the following statement: "Safety should be first and foremost on the mind of the spotter. Remember, the NWS values your safety more than your observations."

Questions About Emergency Communications

Why is SKYWARN only interested in reports of severe weather?

We can assume that no news is good news. In other words, if you do not call in, that tells us that the weather in your location is below the threshold to qualify as severe. What if every weather spotter called in to report good weather, swamping the repeater so the one observer who has spotted a funnel cloud or tornado couldn't get through for ten minutes? In a parallel situation, if there is a flash flood warning and everyone calls in to say that there is no flooding at his or her location, we might not hear the poor guy who is about to float away in the current. Let's do it right! However, when a report of good conditions comes in, a rude response is unacceptable. We need to encourage continued interest in emergency communications. The net control operator should express appreciation for the report and immediately repeat the request for reports of severe weather and/or flooding; they'll catch on. Inquiries to the net are also legitimate, whether from the local group or from "outside" nets.

Is it OK to have your SKYWARN transmissions rebroadcast on the air by local radio and TV stations?

According to ARRL's Regulatory Branch expert, KC1J, it is NOT!!! It is illegal for you, as a radio amateur, using the ham bands, to contribute to the commercial success and competitive position of a radio or TV station by allowing your transmissions to be rebroadcast (thereby "scooping" the competition). However, a reporter may use us as a source of news by making a personal inquiry over the air or

by calling on the telephone. This is simply news gathering, and it certainly serves the public interest to broadcast information about severe weather as soon as possible.

Does the local SKYWARN net have a formal name?

We need your help on this one! We're looking for a name that produces a snappy acronym. The best we have been able to come up with so far is Ohio Valley Regional SKYWARN net, or OVRESKY (pronounced "over sky"). The net run out of the Paducah NWS office is called Tri-state SKYWARN net (in their case, it's Kentucky, Illinois, and Missouri), and we felt it would be best to use a different name. Also, we want to make it clear that this is to be a regional net, not just one by TARS members, and not just one for Evansville or SW Indiana. Furthermore, the name we choose should clearly describe what it is without tortuous twists of the wording. Any suggestions?

Minutes: Board Meeting for May, 1998

Randy N9YAI called the meeting to order at about 7:00pm. He stated he would not be able to attend the coming monthly meeting; Norm W9AU and Joanne KB9LXZ will handle refreshments, and Bill K4LRX will run the meeting. The autopatch and autodial numbers are to be updated, and slots have been given to people who asked for them. The access code will change to "98," from the current "97." Randy discussed the tail-gate party scheduled for June 13 at Wesseiman Woods. \$250 was approved for expenses; the club will furnish hamburgers and hotdogs; talk-in will be on 147.150; stick-on name tags will be available. In considering a gift for the Red Cross, we will talk to Dave WA9C to see what kind of equipment they may need. Mark N9NYF reported that the repeater committee is still searching for a time when they can all meet. Bill K4LRX brought up the matter of charging for ham radio classes—maybe it should be a flat fee of \$25 that includes the book, with an offer of half price for initial membership in TARS. Bill may start another class in August or September. Norm reported there are 132 paid-up members in TARS. Dan KB9GNI has suggested that it might be a good idea for someone to write up the etiquette for repeater use. Tom WA9QDZ was present to discuss procedures for weekly Tri-State Emergency Nets and SKYWARN nets. After considerable discussion, it was suggested that we might try to make the nets seem more friendly and chatty, rather than curt and overly business-like, and that might encourage more people to take part. The consensus was that this might be good for the weekly nets, but Norm W9AU stated it would not be appropriate for RACES or SKYWARN operations. Tom also objected to the SKYWARN net control operator cautioning weather spotters to head the warnings and take cover or not chase severe weather in the darkness of night. We will discuss various net procedures again at future meetings. We should encourage TARS members to check into other nets in the region, and this may inspire reciprocal action by non-TARS hams to "visit" us in the weekly Tri-State Emergency Net. These minutes submitted by Norm King W9AU.

Minutes: Club Meeting for May, 1998

In the absence of Randy N9YAI, who was unable to attend the meeting, Bill K4LRX called the meeting to order at 7:30pm. Norm asked for feedback on SKYWARN net procedures that were published in the May issue of Sparks. Joe KB9GMC asked about the legality of media involvement in the net. The consensus was that it was not legal for amateur transmissions to be rebroadcast over commercial channels, and the question would be put to ARRL's regulatory expert. Those present felt that TARS should not seem to favor one particular station over any others in the tri-state area, and that it is not appropriate to interrupt an on-going net to respond to "live" inquiries by individuals at different radio or TV stations. Joe KB9MY suggested we establish backup repeater and simplex frequencies for the 147.15 repeater to use during SKYWARN activities. Joe KB9GMC discussed the coming Field Day, which will be on June 27-28. The Field Day committee will meet next week to plan the event, and will publish details in the June issue of Sparks. The club approved a budget of \$300 for Field Day expenses. With that, Bill introduced Ron Fields, Evansville's Special Liaison Officer from the Paducah National Weather Service Office. He stated that he is here to be an advisor and observer, to

inform us about NWS procedures, to offer instruction on weather spotting and reporting, and to give us feedback from the Paducah office. He said that although the Evansville NWS office is still officially alive, we should approach our situation as if there will never be another Weather Service office in Evansville, and all of us hams should take an active interest in weather spotting and SKYWARN. He will teach a weather spotting class here on June 11 from 6:30pm to approximately 8:30pm. A sign-up sheet for those interested in the class was passed around, as was a sheet for expressing interest in being a SKYWARN net control operator. These minutes submitted by Norm King W9AU.

